



# Adrenal Fatigue Explained

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*Written by Catherine Clinton, ND*

## **Over extended periods stress can overburden our bodies, an ND can help**

Questions about fatigue are some of the most common that naturopathic physicians hear from patients. We all become run-down now and then due to the stresses of everyday life and the demands of our busy schedules. Over extended periods this can overburden our bodies, creating a situation that's not so easy to bounce back from. In particular the adrenal glands, being in charge of the release of various stress hormones, can become exhausted and unable to effectively do their job. This is referred to as "adrenal fatigue." When this happens our fatigue can become chronic and be joined by other symptoms such as pain and inflammation.



The adrenal glands have many functions, including the secretion of cortisol and other hormones in response to stress. Stress can come from an emotional trigger like a fight with a loved one, trouble at work or a physical trigger like an injury or motor vehicle accident. When prompted by pain or inflammation cortisol is released from the adrenal glands into the blood. Cortisol modifies the inflammatory pathways resulting in a decrease in inflammation and pain. When a drop in blood sugar occurs cortisol is secreted to help balance the levels of sugar in the blood. Cortisol is also released from the adrenal glands in a 24 hour daily rhythm with a burst in the morning to help us awake and a decrease in the evening to help us sleep. When adrenal glands are required to secrete at high levels for extended periods of time due to prolonged stress, pain, or blood sugar imbalances, they can become fatigued or begin to secrete cortisol at lower levels. When this occurs it is common to see an increase in fatigue, pain and/or inflammation.

Naturopathic physicians usually test adrenal function with a salivary cortisol test. From this test naturopaths can effectively diagnose and treat adrenal issues. Some common treatments for the adrenal glands include:

- **Rhodiola:** This botanical has been extensively researched in Russia for its ability to increase physical stamina and increase the body's resistance to stress. It is categorized as an adaptogen by Russian researchers due to its observed ability to increase

resistance to a variety of chemical, biological, and physical stressors. Naturopathic doctors use it in adrenal fatigue treatments to combat stress and increase energy.

- Ginseng: The three ginsengs; Siberian, American and Asian, are all used to treat adrenal issues. Research shows that they increase energy, stamina, and reduce stress. A recent study in 2003 demonstrated how ginseng can effectively help to maintain healthy blood sugar levels as well.
- Stress management: With adrenal issues stress management is vital to any treatment. Proper sleep, stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing or meditation and exercise can all increase the body's ability to handle stress.
- Nutrition/Blood sugar regulation: Eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes that provides antioxidants and nutrients is essential for adrenal health. The adrenal glands need a good diet rich in B vitamins, vitamin C, zinc and magnesium. Eating quality protein at each meal allows the body to maintain healthy levels of blood sugar without taxing the adrenals. Treating adrenal fatigue must address the diet and nutrition of the patient.

Addressing adrenal issues can have profound effects in patient's lives. As with any medical treatment you should contact your local naturopathic physician to receive a treatment plan that fits your individual needs.